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ABSTRACT

Along with national standards, charter schools are one of the most significant forces in education reform today. To their proponents, charter schools are revolutionary forces that help bring public education to world-class standards of quality. To skeptics, however, these forces threaten to undermine, or even destroy, this country's 150-year old public education system. Yet, whatever the future holds for the charter-schools experiment, whether it succeeds or fails, its effects are being felt today. This package from the School Development Outreach Project sheds light on what is fast becoming a national debate about the value and impact of charter schools. It consists of a booklet of collected works, a booklet with frequently asked questions, and three audiocassette tapes. The main booklet consists of: "Charters in Our Midst: An Overview" (Nancy Fulford); "Are Charter Schools Productive Schools? Implications for Public Education" (Sabrina W.M. Lutz); "Accountability and Equity in Charter Schools: Trends in the U.S. and an Inside Look at Chicago's Plans" (Heidi Hulse Mickelsen); "Charter Schools as Change Agents: Will They Deliver?" (Nancy Fulford, Lenaya Raack, and Gail Sunderman); and "Charter Legislation and Contacts in the NCREL States." The other books is "Basic Charter Schools Questions" (Nancy Fulford and D. William Quinn). The tapes include the latest editions of the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory's (NCREL) Rural Audio Journal and Urban Audio Journal, and one special tape entitled "A National Discussion." The materials are designed to help in understanding the nature of charter schools, the effects they are having on public education, and how local district officials are responding to them. (Contains 57 references.) (RT)

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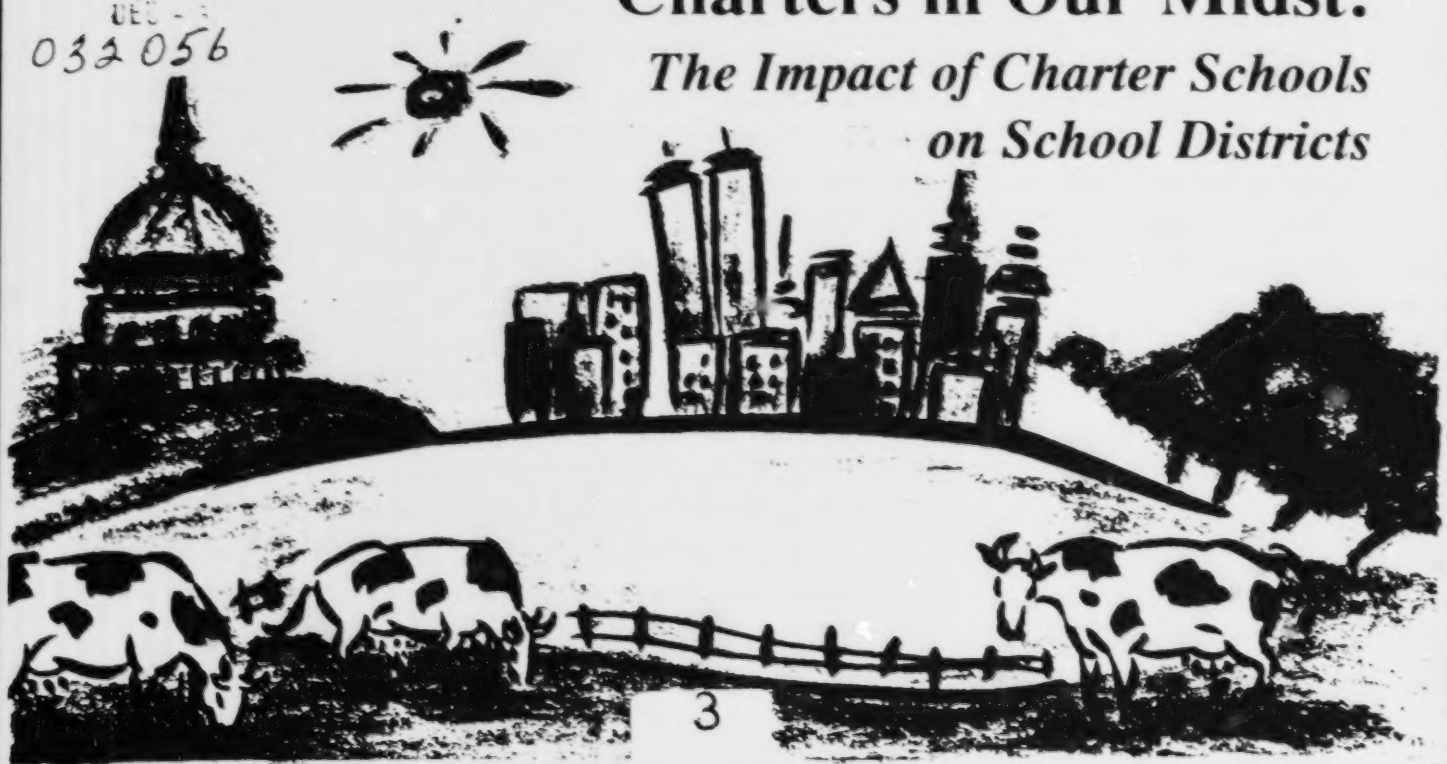
Charters in Our Midst:

The Impact of Charter Schools on School Districts



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Tape One: A National Discussion

Guests:

- Howard Fuller, former superintendent of the Milwaukee Public Schools and distinguished professor of education and director of the Institute for the Transformation of Learning at Marquette University
- James Peyser, executive director of the Pioneer Institute, a free-market think tank in Boston and a member of the Massachusetts Board of Education
- Edwin Melendez, director of the Mauricio Gaston Institute for Latino Community Development at the University of Massachusetts at Boston and a member of the Boston School Committee (school board)
- Gregg Richmond, deputy assistant to the CEO of the Chicago Public Schools, a position that puts him in charge of the district's charter schools program
- James Agee, Michigan state representative, member of the education committee, and former superintendent of the Muskegan (Michigan) Public Schools
- Pat Sandro, special assistant for charter schools at Grand Valley State University and former superintendent of the Grand Rapids (Michigan) Public Schools
- James Renck, an attorney and school board member in Grand Rapids, Michigan
- James Goenner, executive director of the Michigan Association of Public School Academies

Tape Two: Rural Audio Journal

Visit Boyne City, Michigan, a rural district with two charter schools.

Tape Three: Urban Audio Journal

Visit Grand Rapids, Michigan, an urban district with 11 charter schools.

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Charters in Our Midst:

The Impact of Charter Schools on School Districts

A National Discussion With Views From Rural and Urban School Districts

Developed by:

NCREL

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Charters in Our Midst:

The Impact of Charter Schools on School Districts

A Roadmap to What Lies Ahead

Ambitious in design, this School Development Outreach package offers something for every level of interest and expertise in a variety of formats: audiotape, pocket booklet, and quick reference flyer. It is intended for policymakers involved with or considering charter schools or just trying to cope with the growing numbers and visibility of such schools. It also is intended for school districts so that they may learn from others and make solid school reform decisions. Throughout the materials, you will encounter fresh perspectives in the form of personal experiences, research findings, trends, and policy implications.

In this booklet:

Section 1: Overview and Background Information

Highlights:

- Description of charter schools
- Charter schools in the NCREL region
- Charter schools issues
- Current studies and results
- School-level lessons
- Policy and evaluation questions

Section 2: A Research Perspective on Charter Schools as Productive Schools

Highlights:

- Are charter schools educationally productive?
- Comparison of productive charter schools to other productive public schools
- Lessons for policymakers

Section 3: A Look at Accountability and Equity in Charter Schools

Highlights:

- Trends in the U.S.
- Greg Richmond discusses Chicago's accountability plan

Section 4: An Examination of What Is Expected From Charter Schools and Whether These Expectations Are Likely to Be Fulfilled

Highlights:

- Charter schools act as models for innovation
- Charter schools promote greater accountability in public schools
- Charter schools introduce greater choice in public education

Section 5: State-by-State Profiles of the Status of Charter Schools in the NCREL Region

Highlights:

- State legislation
- Current status
- State contacts and Web sites

Section 6: Publications and Articles

Highlights:

- An annotated listing of some of the best publications and articles on charter schools

Section 7: Charter Schools Internet Resources

Highlights:

- Addresses of Internet sites for the NCREL region
- Selected national sites

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Charters in Our Midst

An Overview

by Nancy Fulford, NCREL

Nancy Fulford is a program associate with NCREL's Evaluation and Policy Information Center (EPIC). She is the editor of NCREL's Policy Briefs *and has been studying charter schools since 1991.*

Since Minnesota passed the first state charter school legislation in 1991, charter schools have been a hope, a threat, or a curiosity to many. While many education reform efforts have faded from view, interest in charter schools is not diminishing—it is growing. This growing interest in the charter school concept is due to its possibilities as a truly flexible, self-defining alternative for public schools, groups, and individuals willing to spend the time and effort to create their own schools. As you will hear in the interviews on the tapes in this package, the charter school concept appeals to many different ideological groups, including Republicans and Democrats, liberals and conservatives, for different reasons and for some of the same reasons. Others doubt that charters serve any purpose that can't be accomplished or isn't already being accomplished in traditional public schools. Many oppose the concept because they would like the funding to be made available to private schools (through vouchers) or fear that charter schools will reduce equity across school districts, drain resources from other public schools, and affect teacher

tenure and certification. Another concern is that home school versions of charter schools will use public funding to teach religion in public schools.

Strong supporters of charter schools include parents who have been given the opportunity to choose schools that they hope will benefit their children in specific ways. Indeed, just the opportunity to choose and to be involved in the school in a meaningful way is very important to these parents (parent interviews, Spring 1997). But parent satisfaction does not necessarily mean that children are receiving a better education in charter schools. (A discussion of the impact or likely impact of charters on school reform is included later in this publication.)

What do researchers say about charter schools? At this stage, there have not been a significant number of substantive research studies finding increased student performance in charter schools. However, the experts agree that charter schools are a force to be reckoned with and are not likely to go away soon (Howard Fuller interview, February 6, 1997).

What Are Charter Schools?

Originally even the definition of charter schools was difficult to understand. Charter schools were confused with other educational choice options such as vouchers, waivers, and various alternative public school concepts. At this time, the confusion seems to be mainly with vouchers, perhaps because a few special charter situations (Milwaukee and Cleveland) provide parents with vouchers to send their children to private schools. Charter schools are commonly defined as publicly funded, nonsectarian,

public schools that operate free of the many regulations, restrictions, and mandates of traditional public schools. These schools are chartered or contracted as separate legal entities. As defined in the contract, they are accountable for their results at the end of the contract period—usually three to five years. It is generally agreed that longer contract periods weaken any accountability system, which is the core of the charter approach. Vouchers are per-student, public monies supplied directly to parents, who may use them to pay for a child's tuition to a private and/or sectarian school. (Other terms, such as alternative schools and choice, are explained in the pocket guide, "Frequently Asked Questions" [FAQ], in this package.)

What Is Going On?

Twenty-six states and the District of Columbia allow charter schools. (Some lists also include Puerto Rico.) However, 95 percent of the schools are in eight states: Arizona, California, Colorado, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Texas, and Wisconsin. It is estimated that by the end of 1997 there will be more than 500 charter schools across the country, with numbers expected to grow rapidly over the next few years. (A map of the United States with numbers of charter schools in each state is included in the FAQ pocket guide.) In his 1997 State of the Union Address, President Clinton vowed to expand the number of charter schools to 3,000 by the year 2000. Significant amounts of federal dollars—$51 million—have been made available to states to support charter school development. "Even teachers' unions and school board associations—some of which spent thousands of dollars to fight charter legislation—are

signing on to the concept of publicly funded schools that operate outside most state and district regulations. In early 1996, the National Education Association promised $1.5 million to help its affiliates start charter schools in five states and to study their progress" (Education Week on the Web, 1997).

Each state's legislation varies in strength and process, and each school has its own purpose and accountability system. This flexibility to tailor a school within the limits of state law is a main purpose of the charter school concept. Charters also allow for less bureaucratic governance systems, if desired. Minnesota, California, and Wisconsin have had charter school legislation for some years and have revised and updated their laws as the concept has developed. In some states (e.g., Georgia), restrictive laws, often called "weak laws," seem to sanction the schools while discouraging them at the same time. Some of these states passed charter legislation to keep vouchers from being sanctioned. Other states, such as Michigan and Arizona, have strong or "permissive" laws, meaning that they provide few restrictions and allow large numbers of charters and multiple types of sponsors. Yet another type of charter law is found in Ohio, where charter legislation passed in July 1997, but limited charter schools to a pilot area, Lucas County.

What About the NCREL Region?

Charter schools are especially important in the NCREL region, as five of seven states now have charter legislation. As previously mentioned, Minnesota was the first state to pass charter legislation in 1991, although it had been a choice state since 1985

(North Central Regional Educational Laboratory [NCREL], 1985). NCREL (1993) published an extensive *Policy Briefs*, "Charter Schools: A New Breed of Public Schools," after charter school legislation passed in a second NCREL state, Wisconsin. This *Policy Brief* has been requested by more than 145,000 people throughout the U.S. and the world. Then another *Policy Briefs*, "Charter Schools Update" (NCREL, 1994), was published in response to requests from constituents, including legislators and charter school teachers and students.

The third NCREL state to pass charter legislation was Michigan in 1993. The legislation was first revised in 1994. The whole country is watching Michigan, because it is both a choice state and one of the most expansive charter school states. In 1996, Illinois passed its charter legislation, Senate Bill 19, after several attempts. The Illinois legislation cites at-risk students as the primary reason for creating charter schools, although other purposes are allowed. The first Illinois charter school was started in Peoria. Although the Illinois legislation is limited in that only a local school board can approve a charter, Chicago, the third largest school system in the country, has embraced the charter concept and dedicated significant resources to charter schools. Suburban districts, on the other hand have shown no interest in the charter school movement. (A later article in this booklet focuses on the Chicago accountability system for charter schools compared to regular public schools.) As mentioned earlier, in July 1997, Ohio finally passed charter legislation that is permissive in sponsorships, but limited to a one-county pilot area. Two remaining states in NCREL's region—Iowa and Indiana—have not passed charter schools legislation.

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NCREL Charter School Resources

In 1997, NCREL created a "Timely Topics" Web site on the Internet with the first topic on charter schools located at http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/timely/charters.htm. NCREL developed a charter schools Internet site is to bring together the best resources for its constituents. Besides providing links to many Internet sites and to publications and articles providing resources for charter schools, this site contains up-to-the-minute information on charter schools and answers to frequently asked questions. Users can participate in an online discussion group and access information specific to each of the NCREL states (Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin). The state sites provide summaries or full text of current legislation and direct e-mail links to state contacts. This Web site was developed in connection with NCREL's *Pathways to School Improvement* Internet site, located at http://www.ncrel.org/pathways.htm.

This School Development Outreach Package contains three audiotapes on the impact of charter schools on school districts and reform in rural areas, urban areas, and nationwide; a Frequently Asked Questions pocket guide; an announcement of another issue of NCREL's *New Leaders for Tomorrow's Schools,* entitled "Charter Schools: A New Challenge for School Leaders"; and this charter schools booklet. With this package, NCREL initiates a new phase of charter schools research and product development. NCREL will continue to expand its research and evaluation activities on charter schools.

Charter School Issues

The following issues should be considered when looking at charter schools:

- Definition of a charter school
- Planning and development of charter schools, including pitfalls and possibilities
- Implementation issues
- Equity of access and "creaming of students"
- Reasons for starting and/or choosing charter schools
- Accountability, replication, and evaluation
- Teacher concerns
- School finance, legal, and fiscal concerns

Impact on Students and Districts

An annotated bibliography of some of the most extensive research on charter schools is included at the end of this booklet, along with a list of some of the best Internet sites for charter school information. The Internet sites contain research in progress and the most current information in this rapidly changing area.

The following list provides an overview of key charter school issues:

State Policy

Since the responsibility for operating public education is a state function, the state legislature exercises the option of allowing charter schools. Each of the 26 states that has charter legislation has specified the following:

- How many charter schools are allowed
- Who may grant a charter—a local board and/or some other entity

- Who is eligible to sponsor a charter school—public schools, private schools, and/or a new organization
- Whether a sponsor can appeal if the application is turned down
- Which laws and regulations may be waived
- What are the rights of teachers—are they part of the local bargaining agreement or do they comprise other rights?
- What requirements must be met by teachers—certification or some other standard
- How state and local financial support will be provided, and will other sources be allowed
- What the length of the contract will be
- How results will be measured—state testing and/or other measures

Planning and Implementation

In a state that allows charter schools, those planning to develop and operate charter schools must make decisions about the following issues:

- The ideology, mission, and instructional focus
- The organizational structure and management
- Admission, including nondiscriminatory selection if applications exceed space
- Labor agreements, service providers, and contracts
- Roles and responsibilities of parents/guardians
- Connection to the local school district
- Facility and start-up funds

- Curriculum, instruction, and staff development
- Arrangements for special needs students
- Criteria for teachers and other staff

Research and Effectiveness

A charter school will be judged on whether it meets the objectives it defines in its charter. In addition, policymakers and the public will look broadly at the charter schools concerning whether:

- They deliver education at lower costs.
- They "cream off" high-achieving students or they are diverse and equitable.
- They endure over several/many years.
- They spawn innovation (technology, parent involvement, at-risk student success, and so forth).
- They achieve high student attendance rates and morale.
- They sustain a high graduation rate.
- They have high student and teacher recruitment and retention.
- They develop proven ways to measure their effectiveness.
- They have a positive effect on the public school district.
- They have positive effects on public education in general.

Highlights of Some Current Studies and Results

The first-year report of a national, four-year research effort sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Educational Research and Improvement called "A Study of Charter Schools: First-Year Report, 1997" was released in May 1997. It was written by RPP International and the University of Minnesota. The full text of the report is available at http://www.ed.gov/pubs/charter, as well as in hard copy.

This four-year study will be of major significance, because it is one of the most extensive charter school studies ever conducted (90 percent of all charter schools in operation as of the 1995-96 school year already have been surveyed). The study will include descriptive information about the number and types of charter schools, factors that help or hinder charter schools' development or implementation, and the impact of charter schools on student achievement and public education systems.

The study is addressing three major areas of research and policy:

- **Implementation Issues.** Are charter schools similar to or different from other public schools, and in what ways? What are the students like? What factors influence the development and implementation of charter schools? How do states differ in their approaches to charter schools?
- **Student Issues.** Do charter schools have an impact on student learning? What conditions improve (or do not improve) student learning?
- **Public Education Issues.** How do charter schools and laws affect local and state education systems? Can charter school

reform models be replicated or used by other public schools? Do they put pressure on other schools to reform? What lessons can we learn from them?

(RPP International and University of Minnesota, 1997)

Highlights from the First-Year Report indicate that:

- Charter schools are extremely diverse due to state and local factors.
- States play a primary role in defining charter schools' possibilities.
- Most schools are small, but serve a racially and economically diverse student population, just as other public schools do.
- Developers feel that they have a better opportunity to develop and accomplish goals due to fewer restrictions and stable financial support.
- Challenges for new schools include paying start-up costs, creating time for planning, managing cash flow, and attracting students and teachers.
- Preexisting schools face different challenges—such as struggling with local political and administrative situations—that create restrictions.

The First-Year Report also found that:

- Most charter schools are small.
- Most charters are newly created.
- Charter schools are more likely to serve a wide grade-span or to be ungraded.

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- About one-tenth of the schools were previously private schools.
- The racial composition of charter schools either is similar to statewide averages or has a higher proportion of students of color (as in Massachusetts, Michigan, and Minnesota).
- With the exception of charter schools in Minnesota and Wisconsin, charter schools serve a slightly lower proportion of students with disabilities and tend to serve a lower proportion of limited-English students in all states except Minnesota and Massachusetts.
- The proportion of low-income students is approximately the same as in other public schools.
- Most charter schools are eligible for Title I funding.
- Most new schools are created in order to realize a vision or to serve a special student population.
- The vast majority seek charters to gain autonomy from preexisting public schools.
- Lack of start-up funds—along with other resource limitations—was listed as the most difficult problem.

Joe Nathan, director of the Center for School Change at the University of Minnesota's Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs, is a well-known advocate for charter schools. In testimony before the Committee on Education and the Workforce of the U. S. House of Representatives on April 9, 1997, Nathan answered critical questions about charter schools, described several important lessons learned from the charter schools movement, and suggested actions that the federal government could take to support charter schools.

Nathan lists six school-level lessons, with sources and examples to back them up:

1. *Charter schools can have a positive impact on student achievement, attendance, and attitude.*

   Nathan points to the St. Paul, Minnesota, School Board's recent unanimous vote to renew City Academy's charter because many youngsters who were not succeeding in larger, traditional schools were flourishing in the school's smaller, more intensive program. He also cites the achievement gains of New Visions in Minneapolis, Vaughn Next Century Charter in Los Angeles, Bowling Green Charter in Sacramento, and Academy Charter in Castle Rock, Colorado.

2. *Many charter schools serve low- and moderate-income youngsters.*

   The fear that charter schools would "cream off" the affluent, successful students has not come true. Nathan cites a 1995 survey of 110 charter schools in seven states, which found that most charters were designed, at least in part, to serve at-risk students (Medler & Nathan, 1995). He also notes Louisiana State University analyst Louann Bierlein's review of the six states with the most charter schools, which found that minority youngsters composed 40 percent of charter school enrollments, although the same minorities made up only 31 percent of the pupils in the traditional public schools in those states (Bierlein, 1996). A 1996 Minnesota study and a 1996 Gallup study confirm the diversity of charter school students and the high level of

parent satisfaction. Nathan adds that some of the strongest support for charter legislation is coming from groups—such as the Urban League, Urban Coalition, and A.C.O.R.N.— that advocate for low-income families and youngsters representing "communities of color."

3. Many talented educators will accept responsibility for results in exchange for considerable autonomy.

   The fast-growing number of charter school proposals and the number of new and converted schools that have opened testify to the accuracy of this conclusion.

4. Good ideas aren't enough.

   Charter schools need people with "start-up" skills and operational skills. Successful charter schools often subcontract legal, business, and accounting services. Schools with major problems often lack proper business and financial services.

5. Charter schools can be located in places other than a traditional school building.

   Charter schools have been located in a former VFW hall in Denver, low-income housing projects, a city recreation hall, and social services agencies. Empty stores also are used quite often.

6. One of the biggest challenges facing charter schools is obtaining start-up funds.

   Unlike local school districts, charter schools in most states cannot go to the state legislature or to the local voters to obtain money for building needs. A 1995 survey of 110

charter schools identified funding sources as one of the biggest problems facing these schools (Medler & Nathan, 1995). Most other studies agree (Finn, Manno, & Bierlein, 1996; Nathan, 1997).

Although it is not the purpose of this booklet to report all findings related to charter schools, the growing body of knowledge appears to show similar results: increased student achievement, problems with facilities and finances, high levels of satisfaction by primary stakeholders, and significant numbers of low-income and at-risk students being served. To keep abreast of this increasing body of knowledge, check the newspapers in charter states and use the Internet sources provided in this booklet.

In his testimony, Nathan also listed the important policy lessons found during his research:

1. *The charter idea has encouraged school districts to improve.*

   Districts that have chosen to work collaboratively with charter schools have been able to take advantage of their resources and differences to offer improved training in technology for their staff and to become competitive in offering additional courses and services.

2. *The strongest state laws produce much more activity.*

   Six states with strong legislation produced 222 charter schools, while only 14 schools were created in the states with the weakest legislation.

3. *Many charter opponents have shifted legislative strategies.*

   Those who have opposed charters in the past have more recently supported passage of charter laws that limit sponsorship to the local school board, limit the number of schools allowed, limit the appeal process, and require union sanction or contracts.

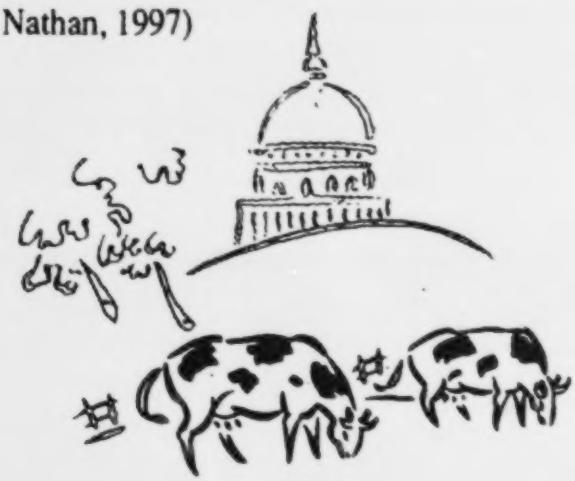
4. *Charter school legislation offers important opportunities for unions.*

   Charters offer a new form of teacher empowerment, employee ownership, and school governance.

5. *The charter movement can learn from the sometimes frustrating experience of inner-city alternative public schools.*

   Many alternative schools were pushed into being "last-chance" schools, serving only students with serious behavioral problems, rather than being allowed to serve a cross-section of students and deliver unique or innovative instruction.

(Adapted from Nathan, 1997)



Key Policy and Evaluation Questions

While the growing knowledge base has helped to define charter schools and to identify their primary components, key policy and evaluation questions still need to be addressed and studied. These questions build on the past evolution of charter schools and lead to concrete and more longitudinal inquiry. The most critical questions are as follows:

- **Finance: Can charter schools increase their share of the education dollars so that start-up and planning costs, transportation for students, and other expenses are equitable and adequate? How?** If these questions are not addressed, charter schools will continue to face insurmountable odds against their success and survival.
- **Replication/Improvement of the System: Can all public schools collaborate and communicate to improve and assist both charters and traditional schools?** If any true gain in public schools is to be recognized, the strengths of all schools need to be harnessed into a systemic effort of choice and support.
- **Accountability and Evaluation: Can we create accountability systems for charter schools that are aligned with those of other public schools, while still measuring their unique programs?** Reliable alternative measures must be created that address individual as well as aggregate accountability for investment of public funds.
- **Equity and Special Needs: Can we ensure equal access and services for those who need special services in charter schools?** Interest in the topic of funding for special educa-

tion and special-needs students has reached an all-time high. With demographics that show increasing populations with special needs, this area is critical to study.

- **Innovation and Educational Productivity: Can we foster innovation, such as technology, parent involvement, small class size, governance and autonomy, professional development, alternative assessment, in these schools? What aspects of charter schools might lead to greater educational productivity?** In order to develop more innovative and productive schools that support current research on what works in education, we must create a coherent system for their development.
- **Legal: Can we foster stronger charter legislation and appeals processes so that these schools have a c ance to succeed?** The ever-so-present politics of education—from the federal to the local level—has a major impact on any results possible from this innovation. Clearly documented history of legislation should give us a direction for future initiatives.

To Follow

The next three papers in this booklet contribute to our understanding of current charter schools issues by examining the issues surrounding our expectations for charter schools, high-level accountability as planned in an urban system, and charter schools as educationally productive entities. In addition, brief summaries of the status of charter schools and/or charter school legislation in seven midwestern states is provided, along with charter school resources.

Are Charter Schools Productive Schools?

Implications for Public Education

by Sabrina W.M. Lutz, NCREL

Sabrina Lutz is a program associate with the NCREL Evaluation and Policy Information Center (EPIC). She is an experienced education policy analyst.

Introduction

Since 1995, the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL) has conducted research to identify which aspects of curriculum and instruction, school organization and structure, and the external environment lead to greater productivity in schools. Educational productivity usually is defined as the relationship between input (dollars spent on education) and output (student achievement or other defined goals) (Clune, 1995). However, NCREL expands this definition to include strategies that schools can employ to boost student achievement through reconfiguration of existing resources (NCREL, 1996). Drawing on school reform research, NCREL has developed a preliminary list of descriptive characteristics (see box) that are believed to lead to an increase in student achievement without requiring an increase in school funding.

Developing productive schools requires that state and federal policymakers empower schools to control resource allocation,

program development, and personnel decisions (Wehlage, Osthoff, & Porter, 1996). In addition, policymakers must provide school leadership with the tools (i.e., resources and technical assistance) to establish high expectations and high standards of learning for students. In exchange for greater local empowerment, state and federal policymakers hold schools more accountable for quality actions and results. An ideal productive schools model combines educational productivity based on a cost-benefit analysis with systemic education reform, promoting coherent policy among the people and agencies providing opportunities for learning.

In light of the increasing excitement over charter schools as a means for achieving school reform, it is important to analyze the policy implications of the charter schools movement. What lessons can early charter school models from the North Central region teach us about accountability and school productivity? To begin to address this question, this article analyzes the policy implications of charter schools for successful school restructuring and sets out to answer the following five questions:

1. How do we measure educational productivity?
2. Which state policies promote educational productivity?
3. Do charter schools lead to greater educational productivity? (Are charter schools productive schools?)
4. Do charter school compacts attend to the characteristics of productive schools?
5. What are the lessons for policymakers?

How Do We Measure Educational Productivity?

The concept of educational productivity is borrowed from the private sector, where a productive system is one that creates a new product when resources are invested. The emphasis is not on the input, but on how to produce more and better outcomes with equal or fewer resources. An increase in productivity often means that human capital has been replaced by a technological innovation that can do the same job faster and more consistently. Thus, one result of increased productivity is that the number of workers will decrease while more goods and services are produced for consumers.

David Grissmer (1997) points out the difficulties in applying the productivity concept to K-12 education. One of the biggest challenges to providing any public service, he says, is placing a dollar value on that service. Schools help prepare students to participate in a democratic society, and the value of this "product" is not easy to measure. Moreover, a significant difference between the private sector and the education system is that the product—namely, a child's education—is labor intensive. Schools are not the only sources of education. The family, the community, and the environment contribute to a child's education, and it is difficult for researchers to separate the contribution that schools make from that of these other sources of education (p. 10). According to Grissmer, another difficulty in measuring educational productivity is the lack of good budget information at the school level, which ideally should link input to expected outcomes for student learning.

Charter schools offer educational researchers a rich field from which to mine information that, when absent, prevents the devel-

opment of good measures of educational productivity in public schools. Because charter schools are site based and their charters hold them accountable for reaching specified learner goals, it is easier to link input to expected outcomes in charter schools than in traditional public schools.

Which State Policies Promote Educational Productivity?

State policies that address traditional governance structures and increase schools' autonomy from state regulations promote educational productivity. Policies that grant the schools more flexibility in making local spending, curriculum, and program decisions typically hold schools more accountable for results.

Researchers Sandra Vergari and Michael Mintrom (1996) found that most state charter laws include some reference to organization, sponsorship, legal status, regulations, accountability, admissions, funding, teachers, and the number of schools allowed.[1] The way in which these issues are addressed in state law may limit or increase the autonomy of charter schools. For example, Illinois set limits on the geographic location and number of schools permitted to operate charters, while Michigan placed no overall cap on the number of charter schools.

The question for researchers, then, is whether more permissive state charter laws lead to greater educational productivity? Clearly, the potential for productivity is greater when schools are exempted from most state and district administrative regulations,

[1] The components of this model were derived from the works of Ted Kolderie, Joe Nathan, Louann Bierlein, and Lori Mulholland.

exempted from most state and district administrative regulations, can hire and fire teachers, and are allowed to customize the curriculum to fit a central school mission. The Consortium on Productivity in the Schools (1995) emphasizes the importance of seeing school reform as a set of interconnected functions. Thus, improving the productivity of individual schools requires changing every aspect of the education system. In a sense, charter policies give schools and/or districts the autonomy to change most aspects of the system. However, while many state charter policies promote productivity, they do not ensure success over time. Even if state policies provide the impetus for school reform, the local school must act on the promise of increased productivity.

Do Charter Schools Lead to Greater Educational Productivity?

Much of the potential for charter schools to be more productive than regular public schools can be found in their commitment to a common educational vision or purpose. According to Priscilla Wohlstetter and Noelle Griffin (1997), who researched early lessons from charter schools, "The school mission is a touchstone for participants' passion and commitment to the school, and when the mission is clear and specific, the school is better able to translate the mission into practice" (p. 9). Teachers, administrators, parents, community members, and students choose to believe in and support this vision, which forms the basis of their participation in the school. Public schools that have been reconstituted, newly created, or required to implement a school improvement plan may well engage in similar conversa-

tions about the purpose and mission of the school. Thus, charter schools can sustain their missions over time by providing professional development, stable goals, and incentives for performance.

Too often traditional public schools are constrained by years of standard operating procedures and policies that are mandated but frequently unfunded. As a result, "shopping mall" schools have become the norm, as programs and policies are added in response to emerging social crises (such as desegregation, teenage pregnancy, and drug abuse) and/or changing state and federal requirements (Title I, IDEA, Goals 2000). Conversely, charter schools are freed from most state and local regulations, with the exception of civil rights policies and programs. Therefore, they are much less restricted by the culture and history of an entrenched public bureaucracy that ties the hands of many traditional public school reformers.

Do Charter School Compacts Attend to the Characteristics of Productive Schools?

As stated earlier, achieving educational productivity requires attention to the whole system, not just improvement of individual pieces. Charter schools' "productivity" is based on their common visions, challenging curricula, supportive policies, and critical connections to people and resources. Charter schools, while subject to some state-level requirements, can create an entirely new school culture and vision for learning that includes every element of a productive school environment. However, without a set of guiding principles from the state department of education or another umbrella organization, charter schools are likely to achieve uneven school reform at best.

In preparing this report, NCREL examined school charters from Illinois and Wisconsin—states with fairly restrictive charter laws where charter schools remain under local district control. Using the preliminary Productive Schools characteristics as a framework, these charters were scanned for characteristics that might lead to educational productivity. Each charter included the school mission statement, an overview of the curriculum, an introduction to the assessment instruments being used, teacher qualifications, a description of the role of parents and the community, and a school budget. Noticeably missing were references to ongoing professional development, an accountability process for both teachers and administrators, and strategies for sustaining parent and community involvement in the school as well as teacher commitment to the school mission.

Professional Development

"What teachers know and can do makes a crucial difference in what children learn" (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 1996, p. 6). This principle has been the rallying point for the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, which has taken the lead in raising awareness among education leaders about the critical role that ongoing professional development plays in raising student academic achievement. Only one of the charter school proposals examined by NCREL included a description of how professional development would be built into the teacher's responsibilities. Yet, the proposals paid little or no attention to the role that professional development would play in achieving the school's mission, despite the time and money that had been set aside for professional development.

Another charter proposal called for two professional development seminars to be held during the year so that teachers can gain exposure to the newest trends in education. But in their study of charter schools, Wohlstetter and Griffin (1997) found that while many of the schools targeted collective time for professional development, the time was used more for planning and school culture building than for helping teachers master new curriculum development and instruction skills. Thus, while charter schools appear to be providing the scaffolding for building teacher knowledge, it is still unclear how time and resources will be used.

Accountability

All school charters contain performance indicators that form the basis of their accountability plans. However, these plans usually are vague, with broad, unmeasurable goals. The process for reporting on these indicators is unclear and often depends on the sponsoring organization and state policies. Without an appropriate mechanism for assessing student progress in charter schools, educators and policymakers alike will be unable to differentiate charter school methods from those of traditional public schools. While the school charters analyzed for this research included performance benchmarks—such as an average attendance rate of 80 percent or above, reading performance at or above grade level, and high performance on standardized tests and portfolio assessments—the charters spent little time discussing the reporting of results and the consequences for students, teachers, and administrators who do not meet the goals.

Charter schools are committed to setting goals and allocating resources locally to reach those goals—a major shift from the practices of traditional public schools. But without a process for measuring and reporting success or clearly defined consequences for not reaching established goals, the incentive for improving academic performance can easily be lost in the everyday challenges of running a school.

Sustaining Commitment

A productive school community recognizes that change and improvement do not happen overnight, and therefore sufficient community support and funding are needed to stay focused. Charter schools require enormous effort in the start-up phase, which has been the downfall of many schools. Most state charter laws do not include additional funding for facilities, teacher training, and planning during the start-up phase. Charter schools typically have required significant effort on the part of one or more individuals to become successful—effort that may not be sustainable over time. According to researchers Mats Ekholm and Matthew Miles (1991), the failure to institutionalize an innovation and build it into the normal structures and practices of an organization leads to the disappearance of many reforms.

What Are the Lessons for Policymakers?

The experiences of charter schools have implications for both regular public schools and new and existing charter schools. Issues of accountability, professional development, and sustained commitment to change are present in all schools, but charter schools have a unique opportunity to address some of these

issues because they are exempt from most legal and administrative regulations. Nevertheless, without more specific guidelines from the state defining a successful charter program and technical assistance to integrate strategies for professional development and sustaining parent and community involvement, many charter schools will repeat the pattern of failed public school reform experiments that preceded them. Based on what is known about the conditions necessary to achieve educational productivity, the following recommendation are for both state and local education leaders:

1. State legislatures should more clearly specify what charter schools will be held accountable for at the end of the initial contract period. They must establish expectations for student outcomes and procedures for evaluating progress—innovations in accountability that have never been tried in public education. This model of accountability requires schools to set outcomes and create instruments for linking input to those expected outcomes. The evolution of charter schools clearly gives educational leaders an opportunity to experiment with new forms of accountability that can document how some schools achieve greater educational productivity.

2. An autonomous professional development/technical assistance body should be created to assist new groups applying for charters and to help existing charter schools remain viable learning organizations. Charter school administrators and teachers confront many challenges at the same time, and therefore need to be directed to appropriate resources. Once innovative schools have become viable, it is important to help them develop partnerships with existing networks to transform pockets of success into new systems of education.

3. Since teacher quality is increasingly linked to student achievement, ongoing professional development for all public schools should become a state funding priority. States such as Missouri and Kentucky have identified a per-pupil level of funding to be used solely to integrate professional development opportunities into the school day on an ongoing and consistent basis.

Preliminary Characteristics of Productive Schools

Productive schools have:

- A clearly defined academic focus and vision for learning
- Relatively stable goals
- Rigorous, challenging learning for all students that engages them in the school and its academic mission
- Clear and focused standards and incentives for academic performance
- Sufficient time and resources to build teacher knowledge and expertise in pedagogy and subject areas
- A school climate that combines academic press and personalism
- High-performance management of student learning at the local school level
- Structural conditions that promote a sense of professional community
- External agencies and networks that support high levels of student learning
- High levels of student achievement

Accountability and Equity in Charter Schools

Trends in the U.S. and an Inside Look at Chicago's Plans

by Heidi Hulse Mickelsen, NCREL

Heidi Hulse Mickelsen has worked on research and evaluation projects for NCREL and provided technical assistance to the Chicago Public Schools. She has an M.A. in educational policy from Stanford University and has worked in a teaching and training capacity in France. She began teaching at the Triumphant Charter Middle School in Chicago, Illinois, in the fall of 1997.

Seven new charter schools with designs and missions as varied as their students opened this fall in Chicago, Illinois, joining 428 other charter schools nationwide (RPP International and University of Minnesota, 1997).

Legislation passed in Illinois in 1996 allowed for 15 charter schools in Chicago, 15 in the surrounding suburbs, and 15 in the rest of the state. Proposals for 38 charter schools were submitted in the city of Chicago, and 10 were approved. Three schools will not open this year due to obstacles such as a lack of resources, difficulty procuring a site, and resistance from surrounding communities. The seven schools that opened in the fall of 1997 are the Academy of Communications and Technology (ACT),

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ACORN, Built Environment, Chicago Prep, Perspectives, SABIS International (two school sites), and Triumphant.

Charter school proponents see these new schools as opportunities for educational innovation, which they believe is desperately needed in Chicago. Opponents of charter schools, however, are concerned with the issues of accountability and equity. They fear that charter schools will not be required to meet the same standards as traditional public schools, while supporters of charter schools argue that new performance standards must be developed for these new types of schools. Opponents also warn that charter schools may attract a disproportionate number of students from a higher socioeconomic background, while leaving low-income students, at-risk students, and students with disabilities behind in the regular public schools.

Research on these controversial subjects is limited, because charter schools have existed only since 1991. Moreover, charter schools are so varied that it is difficult to use information from a selected sample to represent all of the schools nationwide. In an effort to collect and compile descriptive and analytic information on charter schools throughout the country, the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI) has sponsored a four-year study (1995-99) of these schools. The preliminary findings were published in *A Study of Charter Schools: First Year Report, 1997* (RPP et al., 1997).

This study and other findings will be used in conjunction with an interview with Greg Richmond, assistant chief of staff to the CEO of the Chicago Public Schools, to shed light on the issues of accountability and equity in charter schools. Chicago is a city

of educational interest because of both its reputation for poorly performing schools and its proactive approach to education reform. Richmond is responsible for charter school administration at the central office in Chicago. He has extensive experience working directly with the charter school applicants, parents, and outside organizations providing technical support in this endeavor.

Accountability

The issue of accountability has been used as an argument both for and against charter schools. Charter school opponents contend that the standards that charter schools must meet are too nebulous and that freedom from regulation equals freedom from accountability. Proponents of charter schools point out that most states approve charters for three to five years, after which the school can be closed if it is not meeting the requirements outlined in its charter. They claim that this policy requires charter schools to be more accountable than traditional public schools, which continue to function regardless of their performance.

Charter school advocates concerned with accountability focus on how success is measured, particularly the use of standardized tests. They argue that because charter schools often rely on innovative, unconventional teaching methods, curricula, and organization, standardized tests may not be appropriate for measuring their success. "We're expecting [charter schools] to be different," explained Douglas Thomas of the Center for School Change in Minnesota, "but then we're evaluating them on the same content standards as other public schools. We've got to understand that we can't rely only on standardized tests" (Caudell, 1997).

Charter schools are held accountable for their success, but what does "success" mean in charter schools? Most people want to see improved student achievement in the form of increased test scores or other valid measures. Others look to alternative indications of success, such as parent and student satisfaction.

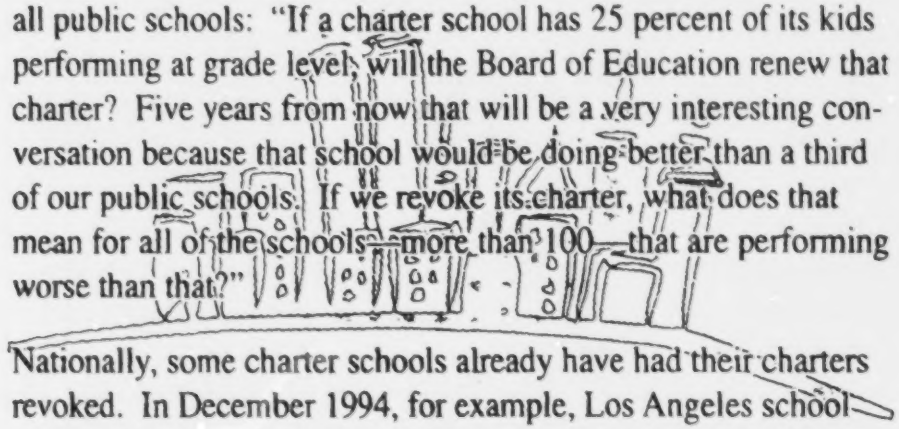
The Chicago school district has identified measures and assessments such as test scores, graduation rates, and student attendance for which the charter schools will be held accountable. But all schools are not held to the same required level of achievement. Schools are judged individually because of differences in the focus or mission of each school.

However, Richmond stressed that each school must thoroughly understand how its achievement will be measured. "In several years we will have schools proclaiming that they have done a very good job and then there will be detractors of charter schools saying, 'Oh no, that doesn't count because of this or that.' We don't need to have a debate at that time. We should look at how the students did and then make a decision based on agreed-upon measurements of whether that achievement was good enough or not" (personal communications, July 8, 1997).

A two-year study of charter schools sponsored by the Hudson Institute (Finn, Manno, & Bierlin,1996) found that most states' charter laws are "stronger on theory than practice when it comes to accountability and evaluation," but that most schools accepted responsibility for their accountability. To hold charter schools accountable, the study recommended "clearly delineated content and performance standards; exams that mirror those standards; timely, understandable, and comparable results, including academic and non-academic indicators of success; and real stakes for all."

In Chicago, 109 schools were placed on probation in 1995 because their students were performing below 15 percent as measured against national norms. Eight schools are being "reconstituted," which is the most severe method of accountability for regular public schools. Charter schools also are subject to accountability. "It is possible to put them on probation," said Richmond. "Reconstitution is simply the end of the contract."

According to Richmond, the district's ability to revoke a school's charter will have implications not only for charter schools but for all public schools: "If a charter school has 25 percent of its kids performing at grade level, will the Board of Education renew that charter? Five years from now that will be a very interesting conversation because that school would be doing better than a third of our public schools. If we revoke its charter, what does that mean for all of the schools—more than 100—that are performing worse than that?"



Nationally, some charter schools already have had their charters revoked. In December 1994, for example, Los Angeles school officials revoked the charter for Edutrain Charter School following allegations of fiscal mismanagement. Richmond explained the general policy of the Chicago district as "a willingness to let schools that are functioning keep working. We only step in where there is failure. If one of these [charter] schools were in that spot [qualifying for probation], it would be a candidate for intervention for which the Office of Accountability [at the central office] would be the monitoring agency. Short of some kind of academic breakdown at the school, I don't expect us to step in before year five and try to revoke a charter."

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Preliminary Findings

A variety of sources have reported promising results in student achievement. A recent article in the Boston Globe (Zernike, 1997) noted that six of the eight charter schools tested in Boston showed academic gains that were "greater than what would be expected in a typical year at a public school." At most of the schools, the students had tested at or below grade level when they entered. Students at two of the schools advanced 1.5 school years in seven and eight months. The Washington, D.C.-based Center for Education Reform (1997) reports additional successes: St. Paul's City Academy in Minnesota, the nation's first charter school, graduated 17 former dropouts in spring 1993. Fifteen of these students went on to college or vocational school. Test scores also have risen dramatically at the Vaughn Next Century Learning Center in California despite a 31-percent increase in LEP (limited English proficiency) students.

The Hudson Institute study (Finn, et al., 1996) found high levels of student, teacher, and parent satisfaction in the charter schools they researched. Most charter schools have student waiting lists, and students in charter schools cited clear academic expectations, committed teachers, safety, individualized instruction, and a family-like atmosphere as the characteristics that contributed to their contentment. Teachers expressed satisfaction with the increased levels of accountability and autonomy, the ability to influence school-level decisions, and the opportunity to work with dedicated colleagues. Parent satisfaction has been apparent in the many waiting lists for the schools, increased parent involvement, and expressions of satisfaction with the schools' minimal bureaucracy as well as their programs and curricula.

More time and research will be necessary to determine whether charter schools will have an impact on regular public schools in their districts or surrounding areas. However, some public schools have started to adopt programs and other practices used by nearby charter schools. The Center for Education Reform reported that Bowling Green Elementary Charter School in California, for example, employed an outside supplier to get lower prices on paper goods and other school supplies. The district, in turn, gave all schools in the district a reduction in the cost of these supplies. Another charter school, City Academy in Minnesota, achieved significant success with its programs for at-risk students and the district began to look at these programs for their own adoption. And Connect School, a charter in Colorado, served as the motivation for a neighboring district to open its own charter school, the Pueblo School for the Arts and Sciences. For some, such minimal influence is hardly enough to justify an investment in charter schools. But for others, such as Greg Richmond of the Chicago Public Schools, "most immediately [the effect of charter schools] is on several thousand children who will have a good school to go to this fall that they are excited about." In the view of other reform experts, such as Howard Fuller, improving the education of even some of our children is worth the effort.

Equity

Many charter school opponents are concerned with equity. Specifically, equity in charter schools involves issues such as recruitment of students, family access to information, and service to students at the margin. Do charter schools "cream," or select, students who are least at risk of educational failure, or do they

"skim" by covertly choosing those students most at risk? Do families of lower socioeconomic status have equal access to information? Does the ability of a family to provide transportation to a charter school affect opportunities to attend? Do charter schools serve special education and LEP students?

These questions are further complicated by the different forms of measurement employed. For example, how many white versus nonwhite students are served can be measured either by comparing student populations in similar schools or by comparing the student population of a school with the makeup of its surrounding community. In addition, statistics reporting student demographics sometimes group together all charter schools within an entire state, when in fact the charter schools in that state vary considerably. In California, for example, many individual charter schools serve relatively few at-risk students. California as a whole, however, is cited as serving many disadvantaged children due to the number of schools that serve disproportionately large numbers of these students (WestEd,,1997). Studies also show that in California charter schools both "cream" and "skim" students, with an average of only 30 percent of the charter schools serving a majority of low-income families. Finally, certain studies on equity have conflicting results. The Hudson Institute study (Finn, et al., 1996) found that charter schools serve a higher percentage of special education students than do regular public schools, while a study sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education (RPP et al., 1997) found just the opposite.

This report, *A Study of Charter Schools*, provides demographic and other student information pertinent to the equity discussion. One of the findings was that "charter schools have, on average, a

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racial composition roughly similar to statewide averages, or they have a higher proportion of students of color." As of 1996, the 58,620 charter school students in ten states were 51.6 percent white, 13.8 percent black, 24.8 percent Hispanic, and 9.2 percent other. Certain states, such as Massachusetts, Michigan, and Minnesota, had a higher enrollment of students of color in charter schools than in the regular public schools. This study finds a slightly lower proportion of students with disabilities in charter schools than in regular public schools. The exception was found in Minnesota and Wisconsin, where charter schools serve 18.5 and 12.2 percent, respectively, of students with disabilities, compared to 9.6 and 9.9 percent at other public schools. Charter schools also were found to serve a lower proportion of LEP students than regular public schools, except in Minnesota and Massachusetts. Approximately the same percentage of low-income students are enrolled in charter and other public schools, and most charter schools are eligible for Title I funding. Fewer than half the eligible schools, however, received Title I funds.

At the time of the interview, Greg Richmond had just received demographic information on the prospective Chicago charter school students, but he had no concrete percentages for ethnicity, poverty, or disabilities. His impression, however, was that the students were representative of the students enrolled in the Chicago Public Schools as a whole. As for special education, Richmond explained that "in the eyes of the federal government, the entity responsible for providing the appropriate services to all students with disabilities is the school district." Special education services provided at charter schools will be funded by the district, and the special education department will work with individual schools as needed. He also added that the charter schools selected

"didn't get into the charter school business because they wanted to revolutionize special education. They got into it because they wanted to improve education as a whole." Charter schools in Chicago will be eligible for federal Title I funding, but each school must pursue the funding individually. There are no start-up funds, cited by *A Study of Charter Schools* (RPP et al., 1997) as the most common barrier charter schools face during the development and implementation stages. However, the Board of Education has contracted with an outside organization to make loans available to charter schools for start-up costs.

Equity in access to information about charter schools, recruitment of students, and transportation to and from school is also a source of debate. Opponents of charter schools contend that low-income or uneducated parents are less likely to pursue educational options for their children. WestEd, a regional educational laboratory serving the western states, found in case studies that charter school parents with less formal education were not as well-informed about the school's philosophy and programs as better-educated parents (WestEd, 1997). Others who question the equity of charter schools believe that insufficient recruitment efforts will discriminate against low-income families. Some charter schools require certain commitments or levels of involvement from attending families and, therefore, may indirectly discriminate against parents who have less time or fewer resources than others (see RPP, et al., 1997; Becker, Nakagawa, & Corwin, 1995). Affordable, convenient transportation has also been found to affect charter school enrollment (Corwin, Carlos, Scott, & Lagomarshino, 1996; Dianda & Corwin, 1994), and many are concerned that families without cars or access to transportation will be excluded *de facto* from charter schools.

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For nearly a year, Richmond has been bombarded with parent inquiries about the Chicago charter schools. He has had to inform some parents that the enrollment lotteries have taken place and that certain schools already have been filled. Because there was no stipulated amount of marketing or promotion for the charter schools, each one took a different approach. Richmond has received no complaints about insufficient access to information, and he reported that "I have not seen any evidence that the schools are not promoting [themselves] properly or that they are discriminating." Regarding the transportation issue, Richmond said, "I have never had a single parent say to me, 'I want to go to that school and it is too far away; they should provide transportation.' I think that parents are a little bit more realistic than some others in terms of things like that. Even if a bus was available, most parents are not interested in sending their child on a two-hour journey across the city."

Even if charter schools are serving a similar number of at-risk students as are other public schools, the question of *how* they are serving these students remains. Disadvantaged students are usually below grade level in basic literacy and numeracy and have a greater tendency to drop out of school. The innovations that many charter schools implement as a result of their freedom from regulations may or may not successfully address the needs of these students. There are isolated success stories reporting increased achievement for at-risk students, but such stories exist for many different programs and schools. Once again, it will be a matter of time before any real conclusions are made about the impact of charter schools on student learning, especially for at-risk students. Yet promising, albeit inconclusive, results indicate that charter schools are worthy of our time and attention.

Charter Schools as Change Agents: Will They Deliver?

by Nancy Fulford, Lenaya Raack, and Gail Sunderman of the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory

Charter school advocates argue that these schools will lead to innovations in school management, curriculum, and instructional practice. In turn, they believe that these innovations will spread to traditional public schools.

State legislation often reflects this expectation that charter schools will act as agents of change for other schools. Minnesota's charter legislation calls for the development of schools that "encourage the use of different and innovative teaching methods." Wisconsin Governor Tommy G. Thompson in 1993 urged the adoption of charter school legislation "to give school districts and teachers flexibility in designing innovative schools."

Charter schools also are expected to serve students who are having difficulty in the traditional public school system, including students who have already dropped out. Under Illinois's charter legislation, a top priority for charter schools is dealing with the problems of at-risk students that the system as a whole has been unsuccessful in solving. Charter schools are expected to develop "innovative educational techniques and programs" for teaching these students.

Whether charter school innovations will be adopted by traditional public schools is part of the larger question of how innovations diffuse throughout a school system. In his book, *Diffusion of*

Innovations, Edward M. Rogers (1995) argues that most people adopt a change only after seeing what happens when someone they know adopts it. Interpreting this research, Bill Quinn, an NCREL evaluator and school reform analyst, explains that "we learn from each other through a social process, and our peers act as models for us." Quinn cites research indicating that superintendents adopting new mathematics curricula did so because they knew other superintendents who had adopted similar curricula. According to Quinn, "Good ideas are rejected and don't get adopted if the social network is broken down" (personal communicaton, July 8, 1997).

An example of the breakdown in this social network is the low regard that public school teachers may hold for charter school teachers. Quinn cites a number of reasons for this lack of respect. Public school teachers tend to view charter school teachers as outsiders who are critical of their efforts rather than as colleagues from whom they can learn. They also may believe that charter school teachers are less qualified than teachers in traditional public schools, especially in states that have relaxed or alternative certification requirements for charter school teachers.

Institutional Barriers to the Diffusion of Innovation

Public schools may be unable or unwilling to implement charter school innovations for political and institutional reasons. Charter schools may be relieved of the regulations, teacher certification requirements, and collective bargaining rules that govern public schools. For example, some may hire noncertified teachers, a move likely to be resisted by teacher unions and prohibited by state regulations governing public schools.

Charter schools also have more freedom to implement changes in class size, an innovation that is expensive for most school districts. One of the biggest concerns of public school officials is the financial threat posed by charter schools. Funding that would otherwise be allocated to the public school follows every public school student who chooses to attend a charter school.

Accountability and Performance Standards

Another expectation of charter schools is that they will promote greater accountability in education in exchange for their increased flexibility and freedom from regulations. Some believe that charter schools will be held more accountable than regular public schools because each school's performance standards must be spelled out in its charter. If a charter school does not achieve its performance standards, the charter can be revoked and the school closed.

The introduction of market-like competition in the delivery of educational services is expected to increase pressure on public schools to perform better. The effect of this option is already being felt as growing numbers of organizations and individuals are developing services and providing options for charter schools and other schools. Contracts for these services can be negotiated and designed to meet specific school-level needs.

Of course, a major challenge for charter schools is to determine whether the school is doing a good job and the students are learning. Critics view charter schools as "loose cannons" with no one ultimately responsible for their performance. Unlike public schools, charter schools have unelected school boards, and as a result they may prove to be less accountable to taxpayers

than traditional schools. Another issue of concern is that the accountability process for charter schools is often ill-defined. To address this issue, Chicago is developing accountability plans with each approved charter school. These plans, according to Gregg Richmond, Assistant Chief of Staff to the CEO of the Chicago Public Schools, "very clearly spell out what the kids will know and what assessments will be used to determine if the kids know it" (personal interview, July 8, 1997).

Expanding Choice Through Charters

Charter schools also are expected to introduce greater choice into public education. Many districts, particularly urban school districts, already have a variety of schooling options, including magnet schools, schools-within-schools, gifted programs, and open enrollment. Private schools and "exits" to better schools in the suburbs are available to those who can afford it. Charter schools expand this range of choices for public school students.

For many school districts, charter schools offer another avenue for meeting the demands facing the public schools. Nick Timmer, Associate Superintendent in Grand Rapids, Michigan, noted that many of the students applying to charter schools "weren't that happy with the regular schools. [Charter schools] want to pull in kids who may have been having some problems in the traditional schools" (personal interview, April 24, 1997). With a long history of alternative programs, Grand Rapids was forced to cut many of these programs because of state budget cuts. Charter schools have pushed the district to reconsider many of these options, according to Roland Wilkerson (personal interview, April 24, 1997), a newspaper reporter in Grand Rapids.

In Chicago, Gregg Richmond said that the district is enthusiastic about charter schools for a number of reasons. "One is that it will be an improved education for students in the schools. . . . But then we also hope to learn from them and translate some of those benefits and knowledge to the other 400,000 students in the city of Chicago. And there's also a third element. There are a great number of families that move out of the city of Chicago once their children reach school age. This might be the kind of opportunity that keeps those families in the city."

Charter schools receive support from an unlikely coalition. They appeal to parents who have already left the public school system in favor of private schools, religious schools, or home schooling. These parents are likely to view charter schools as an alternative that helps mitigate the cost of education. Charter schools also appeal to middle- and lower-class minorities looking for alternatives to the public school options available to their children. As inner-city schools have deteriorated and skepticism about the outcomes of desegregation has increased, many minorities are looking for ways to rebuild schools in their communities.

What Is the Future for Charter Schools?

Charter schools represent less than 1 percent of the schools nationally. Arizona has the highest percentage of charter schools: 10 percent. While charter schools have emerged as an important political issue and as a way to reform the public schools, they are unlikely to change teaching practice in the public schools substantially. As with many policy issues, charter schools issues are far removed from what happens in the individual classroom, the level that most affects how students perform.

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National Commission on Teaching and America's Future. (1996). *What matters most: Teaching for America's future*. New York: Teachers College, Columbia University.

North Central Regional Educational Laboratory. (1985). *Policy Briefs: Choice: Implementation issues* (Report no. 3). Oak Brook, IL: Author.

North Central Regional Educational Laboratory. (1993). *Policy Briefs: Charter schools: A new breed of public schools* (Report no. 2). Oak Brook, IL: Author.

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North Central Regional Educational Laboratory. (1996, Fall). Productive schools: Perspectives from research and practice. *New Leaders for Tomorrow's Schools, 3*.

Rogers, E. M. (1995). *Diffusion of innovations* (4th ed.). New York: The Free Press.

RPP International and University of Minnesota. (1997). *A study of charter schools: First-year report, 1997*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education Office of Educational Research and Improvement. Available: http://www.ed.gov/pubs/charter/.

Vergari, S., & Mintrom, M. (1996). Charter school laws across the United States. *Policy Report No. 2*. East Lansing, MI: Institute for Public Policy and Social Research.

Wehlage, G., Osthoff, E., & Porter, A. (1996). Support from external agencies. In F. M. Newmann & Associates (Eds.), *School restructuring and student learning*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

WestEd. (1997). *Technical proposal: Research on equity issues in charter school programs*. San Francisco, CA.

Wohlstetter, P., & Griffin, N. (1997). *Creating and sustaining learning communities: Early lessons from charter schools*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, IL.

Zernike, K. (1997, June 27). Charter school students show improvements in tests. *The Boston Globe*, p. A01.

Charter Legislation and Contacts in the NCREL States

As mentioned previously, five NCREL states (Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin) have charter legislation. Major components of each state's law are included here. For the complete legislation or more information, use the state contact names and Internet addresses provided. Brief information on the status of choice or charters for Iowa and Indiana also are included.

ILLINOIS

State Contact:
Sally Vogl
Illinois State Board of Education
100 North First Street
Springfield, IL 62777
(217) 782-0541
E-mail: svogl@spr6.isbe.state.il.us
URL: http://www.state.il.us/Gov/press/charter.htm

Major Components of the Illinois Charter School Law (Article 27A of the School Code)

Illinois's 1996 charter law allows 45 charter schools: 15 in Chicago, 15 in the counties surrounding Chicago, and 15 elsewhere. While this cap on the number of charter schools in Illinois is fairly restrictive for such a

large state, it is not unusual. Many states limit the number of charter schools initially.

A local school board must approve the charter school, although the board's decision can be appealed to the state board. The state does not provide funding for start-up costs. However, the Illinois State Board of Education received a federal grant of $788,000 per year (for potentially three years) to stimulate and support the establishment of charter schools.

Like many other states, Illinois grants a charter for no less than three years and no more than five years.

Protecting teacher status is addressed in all charter laws; the Illinois provisions are typical of most states.

The local board must grant a leave of absence for up to five years for teachers wishing to teach at the charter school. Should the teacher wish to return to the traditional school, service status and retirement are not affected. Teachers must be certified in Illinois or meet other defined qualifications.

All states, including Illinois, require nondiscrimination in admissions and usually call for a lottery when applications exceed spaces.

While exempt from most state laws and regulations, Illinois charter schools, like those in other states, must comply with state safety codes and federal regulations. Students in charter schools must take the Illinois Goals

Assessment Program (IGAP) test. Some states require charter students to take the state assessments and others allow charter schools to determine assessment procedures.

The charter school receives no less than 95 percent and no more than 105 percent of the district's per capita student tuition, and the school receives its appropriate share of state and federal resources generated by students with disabilities.

INDIANA

Indiana does not have a charter school law, although there has been legislative interest. (For many years, it has been possible for a school to appeal to the Indiana State Board of Education for the waiver of rules. A modest number of requests are received each year, usually asking for relief from the requirement of 180 days of instruction, in order to give teachers time for professional development.)

In 1995, Indiana passed the "Freeway" bill, a further opportunity for school districts and private and public schools to propose the waiver of state laws and regulations contingent upon the improvement of attendance, academic performance, and graduation rates.

Indiana's most recent attempt to pass charter school legislation failed in January 1997. The legislation would have allowed local school boards to establish charter schools as public schools within the school cor-

poration that the school board governs. The bill limited the number of charter schools to 60 and gave priority to schools that serve at-risk students; it also required 16 of the charter schools to be designed to increase educational opportunities for at-risk students.

IOWA

Iowa, a strong local-control state, does not have charter school legislation, although it has been a "choice" or open-enrollment state since 1989.

MICHIGAN

State Contact:
Gary Cass
Michigan Department of Education
608 West Allegan Street
Lansing, MI 48909
(517) 373-4631
E-mail: cassg@state.mi.us
URL: http://pip.ehhs.cmich.edu/chart/

Summary of Michigan Charter School Law
(Senate Bill 1103)

Michigan's charter school law was passed in 1993 and revised in December 1994. It is considered to be among the most expansive charter laws in the nation.

In Michigan, anyone can organize a charter school. Charter schools may be authorized by local school boards, intermediate school districts, community colleges, or state public universities. The provision for multiple authorizing agencies is considered by charter school advocates to be a strength of Michigan's law.

There is no limit to the number of charter schools, although the number of charters authorized by state public universities is limited to 100 during the 1997 calendar year.

Like other states, in Michigan admissions must be nondiscriminatory; if applications exceed space, a random selection process is required.

Typical of other states, state and local per-pupil funding follows the student to the charter school.

Teachers in charter schools are covered by the same collective bargaining agreements that apply to those in noncharter schools if a school is authorized by a local school district. In all other cases, the teachers are "at will" employees. In general, charter school employees must be certified in those schools operated by universities or community colleges; staff may be noncertified as specified in the charter.

MINNESOTA

State Contact:
William Allen
Minnesota Department of Education
550 Cedar Street
St. Paul, MN 55101
(612) 296-4213
E-mail: bill.allen@state.mn.us
URL: http://www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us/st96/120/064.htm

Minnesota Charter School Statutes (Chapter 120)

Minnesota was the first state in the nation to pass charter school legislation, in 1991. With several changes in the legislation over the years, charter advocates see Minnesota's law as strongly encouraging the concept. Minnesota also has been an open-enrollment, "choice," state since 1985.

Up to 40 charter schools are permitted in Minnesota. A local school board may sponsor charter schools, and the state board may sponsor in cases of appeal. Certified teachers are permitted to establish and operate a charter school. Up to three charter schools may be sponsored by public colleges or universities. Charter advocates consider multiple sponsorship to be a strong provision of the law. Another strength of the law is that it allows existing public or private, as well as new schools, to apply for charters.

Charter schools have blanket waivers from most state education laws and regulations. Some other states also have this provision; in many cases, the laws and regulations from which the school is exempted are specified in the charter. Minnesota teachers are exempt from the district collective bargaining agreements unless otherwise agreed.

Full operating funds flow to the charter schools based on average state and district per-pupil revenue.

OHIO

State Contact:
John Rothwell
Assistant Director, Division of Assessment and Evaluation
Ohio Department of Education
65 South Front Street, Room 804
Columbus, OH 43215-4183
(614) 466-4838
URL: http://www.edweek.org/context/topics/charter.htm

Ohio's Charter Legislation (H.B.215)

On June 30, 1997, Ohio became a charter school state with a bill that creates a pilot charter school program for Lucas County, which includes Ohio's fourth largest city, Toledo. The budget also permits an unlimited number of existing public schools statewide to convert to charter status, although it is not expected that large

numbers of districts will exercise that option. For two years before passage of the legislation, Ohio's charter school proponents had tried and failed to get enough support to pass a charter law. The law finally passed when Rep. Sally A. Perez worked with Governor Voinovich to push for the pilot program in her district. Proponents of vouchers used this same strategy to create a pilot program for vouchers in Cleveland rather than lose a statewide battle.

The biennial budget will grant $3.5 million for planning and start-up money for up to 20 schools in Lucas County. The schools may be sponsored by the county's school boards, the county service center, or the University of Toledo's college of education. Therefore, although the pilot area limits numbers and access for the new charter schools, the multiple possible sponsors strengthens the law. The Ohio Education Association supported the law, but others in the county, including the local school district, are not "pushing" charter schools.

As mentioned, Ohio also has a voucher program limited to Cleveland for the next two years. The Governor has been a champion for vouchers in the state. Three thousand children (chosen by lottery) are eligible to receive the $2,500 vouchers. The voucher program in Cleveland includes religious schools. The city's schools will come under the control of the the mayor under legislation that will be signed by the Governor (Education Week, July 9, 1997).

WISCONSIN

State Contact:
John Sauerberg
Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction
125 South Webster
Madison, WI 53707-7841
(608) 266-5728

Wisconsin Charter School Legislation

Wisconsin's charter school law, enacted in 1993, was the eighth in the nation. There is now no limit to the number of schools permitted to be chartered in the state. The local school board is the only entity that can grant a charter for a period of one to five years. Generally only existing public schools are eligible. However, special provisions in the law for the Milwaukee Public Schools allow private schools to become charter schools and to appeal district school board charter school decisions to the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. Milwaukee's voucher program is restricted to private but not religious schools as allowed in Cleveland.

Charter schools have a blanket waiver from most state education laws and regulations.

Teachers are covered by the district's collective bargaining agreement, except in Milwaukee, unless they choose to establish a separate collective bargaining unit.

The state legislation provides no start-up funds, although new federal legislation made $783,750 available to the state for 1997, with the potential for two additional years of funding. The state made this first money available to 12 existing charter schools and to 13 districts for planning activities. In spring 1997, an additional $500,000 from the federal government for charter school funding brought the total to $1,325,000.

The amount to be paid by the school board to the charter school must be negotiated in each contract. Many states provide the same funding to both charter and non-charter schools.

Some major charter school legislation changes should be resolved soon. Information on these changes and a complete report on Wisconsin charter school progress are expected in fall 1997.

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Publications and Articles

Some of the descriptions included here are taken from abstracts in the ERIC database. Copies of documents that contain an ED accession number can be purchased from:

ERIC Document Reproduction Service
7420 Fullerton Road, Suite 110
Springfield, VA 22153-2852

Allen, J. (1995). *Nine lies about school choice: Answering the critics*. Washington, DC: Center for Education Reform.

Ample evidence indicates that school choice would spur improvements in the way schools operate and thus improve education for America's children. However, criticism and misinformation abound. Most opponents are motivated by the challenge that choice poses to their bureaucratic power; others are motivated by misunderstanding and misplaced concerns. Other worries stem from the belief that if some schools—particularly private schools—are included in a choice program, they will cream off "profitable" students or discriminate in other ways, and may shortchange students. Insisting that these worries are baseless, this document states that not only do schools participating in choice programs abide by nondiscrimination policies, but they also have a history of providing a more integrated environment and a higher caliber of education than traditional government schools.

Amsler, M., & Mulholland, L. (1992). *Charter schools*. San Francisco, CA: Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development.

Explores the charter school concept, looking specifically at (1) the development of the charter school idea; (2) current models of charter schools; (3) issues regarding the development of charter schools, such as district reluctance, teacher concerns, organized opposition, fiscal issues, and admission policies; and (4) progress at the state and federal level in the development of charter schools. The charter school plan in Minnesota, the first state to legislate charter schools, is described in detail. Action in California, Arizona, Nevada, Utah, Pennsylvania, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Michigan, and Tennessee is also described. The authors conclude that charter schools offer a new vision of educational services and opportunities for parent, teacher, and student empowerment.

Bierlein, L. A., & Bateman, M. (1995, November). Opposition forces and education reform: Will charter schools succeed? *Network News & Views, 14*(11), 682-688.

Examines the concept of charter schools, their appeal to reformers, and the resistance to their implementation. Specifically, the conceptual underpinnings of charter schools are identified, as are the forces impeding the long-term success of the charter school movement.

Bierlein, L., & Mulholland, L. (1993). *Charter school update: Expansion of a viable reform initiative*. Tempe, AZ: School of Public Affairs, Arizona State University.

As of 1993, eight states (Minnesota, California, Colorado, Georgia, Massachusetts, Missouri, New Mexico, and Wisconsin) had passed some type of charter school legislation. This report provides information on activities and legislation in these states regarding charter school formation, including the roles played by individual teachers and others as organizers, by local school boards as sponsors, and by county or state officials in providing an appeals process and technical assistance. Statutory requirements, legal responsibilities, funding mechanics, and employment issues, including hiring and dismissal, collective bargaining, and job security, also are detailed. Recommendations are offered to policymakers considering charter school legislation.

Broderick, C. (1995, October). Rocky Mountain rift: In the mile-high city of Denver, a maverick school board challenges the state's charter school law. *American School Board Journal, 182*(10), 32-34.

Describes the efforts of teachers and parents in Denver to open a charter school that is being vigorously blocked by the school board. Discusses the pros (offer nontraditional teaching methods and institutional autonomy) and cons (drain public funds from poor schools) of charter schools.

Corwin, R. G., & Flaherty, J. F. (Eds.). (1995). *Freedom and innovation in California's charter schools*. Los Alamitos, CA: Southwest Regional Educational Laboratory.

Summarizes results of a mail survey of administrators and teachers in the 66 charter schools operating in California in the winter of 1994-95. Also gives results from a similar survey sent to principals of noncharter schools the students would have attended if not enrolled in a charter school. Questions addressed included the following: What are the characteristics of charter schools and how do they differ from other schools? How much autonomy do they actually have and does autonomy make any difference? Are charter schools introducing innovative educational programs? What kinds of teachers choose to work in charter schools and how do they perform? Who has access to charter schools?

Dale, A. H. (Ed.). (1996, Fall). *National charter school directory* (3rd ed.). Washington, DC: Center for Education Reform.

Gives state-by-state listing of charter schools as well as a chronological listing by year opened. Included for each school are enrollment figures, grade-level range, and a brief description. Appended are charter school organizations and resources, as well as a charter school contact person in each state.

Dianda, M., & Corwin, R. (1994). *Vision and reality: A first-year look at California's charter schools*. Los Alamitos, CA: Southwest Regional Educational Laboratory.

By the end of 1993, California had 144 charter schools either operating or being planned. Although it is too early to evaluate how all the charter schools are performing, it is important to track their evolution. This report offers an initial look at how they are doing.

Education Commission of the States. (1995). *Charter schools: What are they up to? A 1995 survey*. Denver, CO: Author.

Charter schools operate independently of local school districts and are designed to exist outside of most rules and regulations. A charter is essentially a contract, negotiated between those people starting the school and the official body in the state empowered to approve the charter. ECS conducted a national survey of the charter schools approved to date. This document outlines the information gathered in that survey.

Education Industry Report. (1996). *Charter laws: What they mean for the industry*. St. Cloud, MN: Author.

Provides the "state of the art" of the success of the charter school movement, maintaining that the majority of the schools are successfully meeting their objectives. Gives implications for the role and opportunities for business

in the education market. Several other articles about charter schools are included in this issue of the newsletter.

Fine, M. (1993). *Democratizing choice: Reinventing public education*. New York: CUNY Graduate Center.

Discusses "public sector restructuring" (i.e., charter schools) as an alternative to a voucher system. Discusses the charter schools effort in Philadelphia: During the first three years, 81 charters were developed in 22 existing public, comprehensive high schools.

Finn, C. E., Jr., Manno, B. V., & Bierlein, L. (1996). *Charter schools in action: What have we learned?* Indianapolis, IN: Hudson Institute.

Contains findings of the first year (1995-96) of a two-year Hudson Institute study of U.S. charter schools, focusing on their start-up problems, solutions to those problems, and the policy environments in which such schools are most apt to thrive or falter.

Flake, J. (1996). *Synchronize your watches to Arizona time*. Washington, DC: Education Leaders Council.

Discusses education reform efforts in Arizona, such as charter schools (with 50 already in operation in 1996 and 38 more scheduled to open in 1997), open enrollment in public schools, school accountability, graduation and promotion standards, and capital finance.

Gough, P.B. (Ed.). (1996, September). *Phi Delta Kappan, 78*(1).

Includes the following articles:

- "Possibilities, Problems, and Progress: Early Lessons for the Charter Movement" by Joe Nathan
- "One School's Journey in the Age of Reform" by Larry Myatt and Linda Nathan
- "City Academy" by Milo Cutter
- "O'Farrell Community School: Center for Advanced Academic Studies" by Bob Stein
- "A Choice to Charter" by Doug Thomas and Kim Borwege
- "Charter Schools: The Revitalization of Public Education" by James Goenner
- "The Story of California's Charter School Legislation" by G. Hart and S. Burr
- "Charter Schools: California's Education Reform 'Power Tool'" by E. Premack
- "Colorado's Charter Schools: A Spark for Change and a Catalyst for Reform" by William Windler
- "School Choice: To What End?" by Tony Wagner
- "The Evolution of the Charter Concept" by Ray Budde

Kearney, C. P., & Arnold, M. L. (1994). Market-driven schools and educational choices. *Theory Into Practice, 33*(1), 112-117.

Examines various issues related to the current efforts to establish market-driven schools and broaden the educational choices available to students and parents, focusing on increased academic achievement, secondary effects of market-driven schools, choice as a valued end in itself, and social equity.

Kolderie, T. (1994). Charter schools: The states begin to withdraw the "exclusive." *Network News & Views, 13*(2), 103-113.

Describes the essentials of the charter idea, distinguishing features in the various states, and emerging dimensions of the charter idea.

Little Hoover Commission. (1996). *The charter movement: Education reform school by school.* Sacramento, CA: Author.

Reports the results of an evaluation by the Little Hoover Commission, which found that although the academic results are not yet clear, charter schools can be judged at least a partial success on the basis of a variety of criteria. These criteria include test scores and other pupil assessment tools, parental satisfaction, fiscal prudence and economical value, academic innovation, enhanced

opportunities for teachers, increased focus on low-achieving students, avoidance of discrimination, and consequences for performance.

Mulholland, L., & Amsler, M. (1992). *The search for choice in public education: The emergence of charter schools.* San Francisco, CA: Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development.

Explores the charter school as another option in the search for choice. The development of the charter school concept for American schools is outlined. A discussion of current models of charter schools looks at design and implementation issues. The document deals briefly with the Minnesota experience, policy concerns, charter schools legislation in ten other states, and local and federal responses to charter schools. British grant-maintained (GM) schools are outlined, and their differences from charter schools are explained. The politics of GM schools and the effects they have on British education are also described.

Nathan, J., & Ysseldyke, J. (1994). What Minnesota has learned about school choice. *Phi Delta Kappan, 75*(9), 682-688.

Support for Minnesota's cross-district public school choice laws is strong. In 1992, 76 percent of Minnesotans favored choice as one part of the comprehensive reforms needed. This article debunks seven widely circulated myths about the state's choice plans, particularly

regarding program effects, benefits for disadvantaged students, parental selection criteria, teacher attitudes, and contributions of chartered schools to educational reform.

Randall, W. T. (1996). *Charter schools: What Colorado has learned over the past two years*. Alexandria, VA: National School Boards Association.

With two years of experience and 24 schools in operation after the passage of Colorado's Charter School Act in 1993, several important lessons have emerged as fundamental to the success of these alternative models of schools. Reported in this article are factors crucial to determining whether a charter school proposal would gain initial approval and have a chance of long-term success.

Sanchez, K., Smith, G., Arnove, R., & Kuzmic, J. (1990). *Educational choice*. Bloomington, IN: Consortium on Educational Policy Studies.

Discusses factors that make choice programs effective and describes the types of choice programs currently in use in school districts. Types include magnet schools, intra-district open enrollment, and cross-district open enrollment.

Scherer, M. M. (1996, October). *Educational Leadership, 54*(2).

Includes the following articles:

- "New Options, Old Concerns" by John O'Neil
- "Charter Schools: The Smiling Face of Disinvestment" by Alex Molnar
- "Early Lessons of the Charter School Movement" by Joe Nathan
- "Charter Schools: A New Barrier for Children with Disabilities" by Joseph R. McKinney
- "The Pitfalls and Triumphs of Launching a Charter School" by Linda Page with Mark Levine
- "Why Do Parents Choose Alternative Schools?" by Sally Bomotti

Semple, M. (1995). Legal issues in charter schooling. *The School Administrator, 52*(8), 24-26.

Discusses the most likely legal issues to arise concerning charter schools: teacher employment and qualification issues, liability concerns, special-needs student issues, due process, religious issues, and contract rules. School leaders can head off problems by clarifying who is in charge, spelling out the mission statement, and dealing up-front with charter terms.

Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (1995). *Charter schools: Early learnings*. Austin, TX: Author.

Using research findings from experiments in some states, SEDL has condensed some of the early lessons—both successes and failures—into this *Policy Briefs* that also highlights the implications of these findings for future policy decisions.

State of Illinois. (1996). *Public Act 89-450*, originated in the Senate. Springfield, IL: Author.

Section 5 of this act amends the Illinois School Code by adding Article 27A, the Charter Schools Law.

Urahn, S., & Stewart, D. (1994). *Minnesota charter schools: A research report*. St. Paul, MN: Minnesota House of Representatives Research Department.

Presents findings of a study that examined the charter schools that were proposed and operating in early 1994 in Minnesota. Data were obtained from a review of charter school documents from the Minnesota Department of Education; survey data collected in 1994 from superintendents, school board members, and parents; and site visits to the six charter schools operating in 1994. The study elicited information on charter school proposals, general school characteristics, parent attitudes, problems, and policy implications. Findings indicate that 21 charter schools have been proposed in

Minnesota; more than half have been approved. In general, school boards approved proposals that targeted specific populations, particularly at-risk and special education students and dropouts. School boards were philosophically divided in their opinions about charter schools. Parents of charter school students were generally satisfied, particularly with curricula. Charter schools experienced problems with transportation, facilities, special-needs students, and relationships with school districts that ranged from neutral to antagonistic. Challenges to charter schools include questions about the extent of freedom from state regulation, accountability, the need for extensive planning, funding, and alternative transportation arrangements.

U.S. General Accounting Office (1995, January). *Charter schools: A growing and diverse national reform movement* (Report No. GAO/T-HEHS-95-52). Washington, DC: Author. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 381 859)

Remarks focus on charter schools' instructional innovations, autonomy, accountability systems, and the challenges they pose for federal programs.

U.S. General Accounting Office (1995). *Charter schools: New model for public schools provides opportunities and challenges* (Report No. GAO/HEHS-95-42). Washington, DC: Author.

This report was prepared in response to requests by Senators Specter and Kennedy for information regarding charter schools. It presents data on the following: the number of charter schools approved under state law, characteristics of charter school instructional programs, factors for school autonomy, accountability mechanisms, and the challenges posed by charter schools for federal education programs. Methodology included (1) a review of documents for most of the 83 approved or proposed charter schools as of May 1994 (in California, Colorado, Massachusetts, and Minnesota); (2) telephone interviews with the principals of 50 charter schools, district officials in 34 school districts with charter schools, and state officials in the 11 states with laws authorizing charter schools; (3) analysis of the laws of the 11 states; and (4) a review of oral updates provided by officials in the 11 states. Findings indicate that as of January 1995, 134 charter schools had been approved in 9 of the 11 states with charter school laws. Great diversity existed among charter schools in instructional programs, autonomy, and assessment plans. An important issue is whether charter schools can be considered to be local education agencies (LEAs) and thus be eligible for Title I funds. It is recommended that the Secretary of Education determine

whether states may consider charter schools to be LEAs for federal program administration.

WestEd. (1996). *From paper to practice: Challenges facing a California charter school* (Technical report and executive summary). San Francisco, CA: Author.

Includes a full report and executive summary based on a detailed case study of the charter school at Harriet Tubman Village, in operation since September 1994. The focus of the evaluation was obtaining a better understanding of the school's progress in meeting its objectives and carrying out its program. Findings addressed four general areas: (1) educational program, (2) staff characteristics and beliefs, (3) governance and other issues, and (4) parent perspectives, including their attitudes about the school.

Yamashiro, K., & Carlos, L. (1996). *More on charter schools*. San Francisco, CA: WestEd.

By the end of 1995, 19 states had passed charter school legislation, and at least 16 others had considered similar legislation. This document summarizes the issues surrounding charter schools and the implications of recent research about the charter school movement's failure. The document defines charter schools and their organization, describes reasons for their popularity, and highlights the status of charter schools in the western United States. Research findings in the following areas are

summarized: evaluation and accountability, funding, innovation, approval and appeal processes, and at-risk students and equity. At issue is not just the success of a handful of schools, but an entire school of thought about which particular forces sustain systemwide transformation in public education. A list of charter school contacts in 17 states is included.

Young, T. W., & Mah, D. (1994, Fall). Bowling Green elementary charter school. *New schools, new communities, 11*(1), 21-25.

Discusses one example of successful school restructuring at California's Bowling Green Elementary School. Key contributing elements discussed are having a low student-to-teacher ratio, using integrated thematic instruction, developing an efficacy approach, mastering adopted standards, and developing site-based decision making.

Charter Schools Internet Resources

NCREL Timely Topics—Charter Schools Web site
http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/timely/charters.htm

U.S. Charter Schools Web site (WestEd)
http://uscharterschools.org

The American Association of Schoo lministrators
http://aasa.org/charters/charter.htm

California Network of Educational Charters (CANEC)
http://wpusd.K12.ca.us/caneccanec.html

The Center for Education Reform
http://edreform.com/charters.htm

California State University (CSU) Institute for Education Reform
http://www.csus.edu/ier/resources.html

Charter Schools—Briefing
http://www.ed.gov/offices/OERI/GFI/gfichar1.html

Charter School Research
http://csr.syr.edu

Charter Schools Office (at Central Michigan University)
http://charter.ehhs.cmich.edu

Index of Social and Urban Policy Texts
http://www.dlcpi.org/texts/social/ischool.htm

Oregon Democratic Leadership Council
http://www.nworld.com/~odlc/csch.html

Education Commission of the States
http://www.ecs.org/ecs/220e.htm

Education Week on the WEB—Charter Schools
http://www.edweek.org/context/topics/charter.htm

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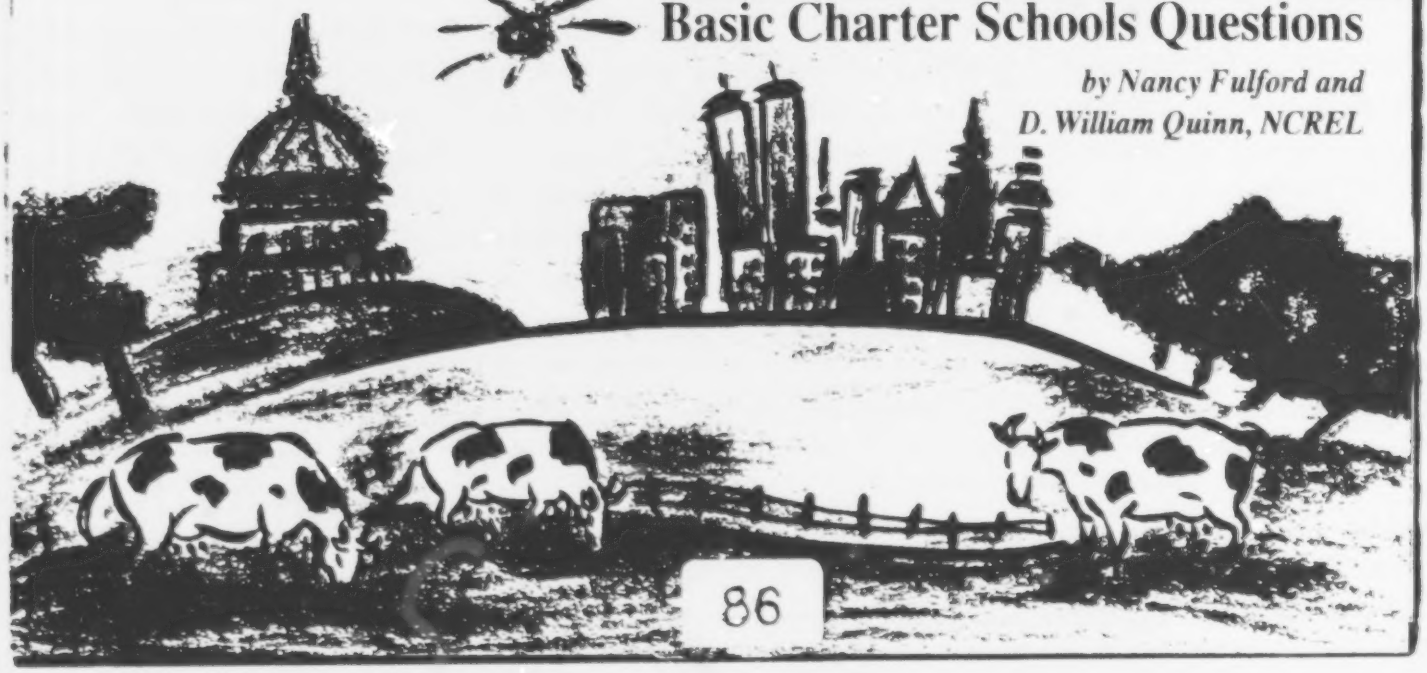
Frequently Asked Questions

Basic Charter Schools Questions

by Nancy Fulford and
D. William Quinn, NCREL



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What are charter schools?

Charter schools are publicly funded, nonsectarian public schools that operate free of the many regulations, restrictions, and mandates of traditional public schools. These schools are chartered, or contracted, as separate legal entities and are accountable for their results (as defined in the contract) at the end of the contract period, usually three to five years in length.

Why the interest in charter schools?

Interest in charter schools is growing because they offer a flexible, self-defining alternative for public school reform. The possibilities for innovation, as a vehicle to think differently and organize in new ways, are strong. Charter schools provide choice for both students and teachers. They expand the concept of "choice" with more autonomy from existing public schools. They are more acceptable to many people than vouchers, so they are sometimes a compromise when vouchers are proposed. The federal government is making additional funds available to assist in the start up of charter schools. Opponents of charter schools most often cite equity concerns, teacher union contract and certification terms, and potentially unhealthy competition with existing schools.

What do the terms waivers, vouchers, open enrollment or choice, private schools, and other alternative-type schools mean?

Waivers are formal requests made to the state to avoid following certain state regulations. These requests often concern the length of the school year and other time restrictions. Vouchers are per-student, public monies supplied by the state directly to parents who may use them to pay for a child's tuition to a private and/or sectarian school. Open enrollment or choice states allow students to attend schools out of their area. If enrollment is completely open, students may attend any school in the state. Private schools are sponsored by a nonpublic group. They may or may not charge tuition to students, but usually do. They may be sectarian or nonsectarian. Alternative schools still operate within the confines of a school district's governance; however, they may focus on a particular theme or instructional technique or be designed for a particular group of students.

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Who can start a charter school and how?

Each state's legislation specifically defines who can apply for a charter. The most restrictive legislation only allows a local district's school board to apply. Other states allow a percentage of teachers in a school or district; any group of teachers, parents, and community and business members; a university or other school; and the state to apply. Charter applications must include goals and mission, curriculum and instructional objectives, governance information, assessment and evaluation procedures and goals, and fiscal management information. The application is reviewed and granted (or not) by the designated granting body(ies) for the state. An appeal process is also specified.

Who can attend?

Students apply and are accepted until the school is full (many charter schools are small). In some instances, lotteries or other such means are used to determine which students are accepted. Many schools have waiting lists.

Who is allowed to teach in charter schools?

Some states allow only certified teachers. Some states also allow noncertified teachers with certain specified credentials, such as experience and a BA.

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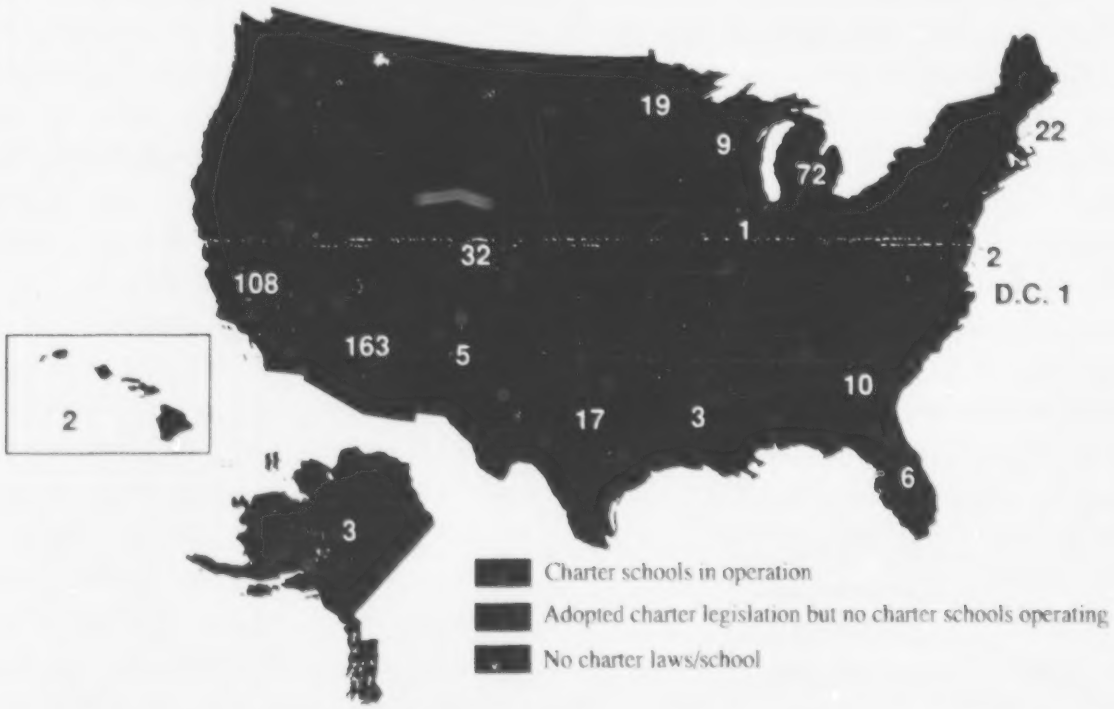
Where are charter schools and how many are in existence?

Currently, 26 states and the District of Columbia have charter legislation. Of these, the following states contain a significant number of charters: Arizona, California, Colorado, Michigan, Minnesota, and Texas. Georgia and Wisconsin also have higher numbers than many states. Current listings of the numbers of individual charter schools is approximately 500. It is difficult to keep the number current due to new start ups.



Source: Center for Education Reform

This map is reprinted with permission from the Center for Education Reform, Washington, D.C.

How are they funded?

The per-student state and local funds follow the child to the charter school. Although, in some cases, formulas do exist concerning maximums and minimums. Some states allow additional fund raising and support through donations and grants. Few states have state funds for start-up costs; however, the federal government has $50 million for state grants to support the establishment of charters. States may pass these monies along via local grants. Special education and other federal monies also follow the student. Charter schools are not allowed to charge tuition.

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What rules and regulations can be waived?

In general, all rules and regulations can be waived except health and safety and federal regulations. In some states, however, certain state regulations, such as test requirements, are not allowed to be waived. These exceptions limit the autonomy of the state's charter schools.

What about special needs and special ed students?

Special students cannot be excluded from applying to and attending charter schools. Charter schools must work out a suitable arrangement to serve these children's needs.

How are the schools doing? How will they be evaluated for effectiveness?

Much research on charters now focuses on how well they are achieving their goals. Some schools have already been successful enough to retain their charters, proving that they have met their original goals. A few charters have been revoked due to lack of proper financial management or lack of achievement. Each charter sets its own benchmarks for success and evaluation. These goals are approved, along with the application, by the sponsoring agent. Some of the main areas where people have been reporting improvement in charter schools are in parent and student satisfaction/involvement, innovation in technology, curriculum and assessment, and governance and organization.

Evaluation and Policy Information Center

The Evaluation and Policy Information Center (EPIC) brings together evaluation and policy research and analysis to support schools, communities, districts, and states as they formulate and establish policies about teaching and learning. It also assists various education stakeholders to evaluate the effectiveness of their efforts. EPIC's work includes research and development around critical policy issues. Through policy research and analysis and a wide range of evaluation studies, EPIC develops products and services to help decisionmakers review and formulate policies; evaluate alternatives; and assess implementation, progress, and outcomes. EPIC is assisted and supported by networks of policymakers, researchers, and evaluators.

The Urban Initiatives Project

The mission of the Urban Initiatives Project is to improve education for urban children and youth, especially those who are underachieving and historically underserved. The Initiative's products and services connect superintendents, principals, and teachers from nearly 5,000 urban schools in the Midwest to research and practice. We work in partnership with schools and districts to build capacity for: (1) teaching advanced skills to all students, (2) implementing multicultural education, (3) leading school change and innovation, and (4) supporting professional development that promotes whole-school change.

The Rural Initiatives Project

The mission of NCREL's Rural Initiatives Project is to be a resource for, and provide assistance to, the education professionals responsible for students and schools in rural communities. Our goal is to bridge the gap that often exists between research, theory, and practice and to work with rural educators to improve instruction for all students, especially those most at risk of failure.

The Rural Initiatives Project focuses its efforts on helping rural educators create strong professional communities among themselves and with others, and then working through these communities to meet the diverse needs of rural children.

The Charter Schools Work Group

This product is a collaborative project of NCREL's Charter Schools Work Group. Members of the work group include: Judy Caplan, Joe D'Amico, Deanna Durrett, Robin Fleming, Ann Freel, Nancy Fulford, Arlene Hough, Lynne Huske, Sabrina Lutz, Heidi Mickelsen, D. William Quinn, Lenaya Raack, and Lynn Stinnette.

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About NCREL

The North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL) is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to helping schools—and the students they serve—reach their full potential. Our mission is to strengthen and support schools and communities so that all students achieve standards of educational excellence. We accomplish our mission through policy analysis, professional development, and technical assistance, and by leveraging the power of partnerships and networks.

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Charters in Our Midst: The Impact of Charter Schools on School Districts

Along with national standards, charter schools are one of the most significant forces in education reform today. To their proponents charter schools are revolutionary forces that help bring public education to world-class standards of quality. To skeptics, however, these forces threaten to undermine, or even destroy, this country's 150-year-old public education system. Yet, whatever the future holds for the charter schools experiment—and it is an experiment—whether it succeeds of fails, its effects are being felt today.

This package from the School Development Outreach Project sheds light on what is fast becoming a national debate about the value and impact of charter schools. It consists of three tapes, a guide to frequently asked questions, and a policy booklet of current issues. The tapes include the latest editions of NCREL's *Rural Audio Journal* and *Urban Audio Journal* and one special tape entitled *A National Discussion*. The materials will help you understand the nature of charter schools, the effects they are having on public education, and how local district officials are responding to them.

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